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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 TAIPEI 001403

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STATE PASS AIT/W

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SUBJECT: 3/26 RALLY AIMS TO CONTAIN ANTI-SECESSION LAW  
FALLOUT

REF: TAIPEI 1229

Classified By: AIT Director Douglas Paal, Reason: 1.4 (B/D)

11. (C) Summary: President Chen Shui-bian announced on March 24 that he would participate, but not speak at, the March 26 "Use Peace and Democracy to Protect Taiwan" rally in Taipei. Presidential aides say the rally is aimed at releasing public anger over the PRC's March 14 enactment of the Anti-Secession Law in a way that will not further exacerbate cross-Straits tensions. The government appears to have successfully blocked attempts by Lee Teng-hui's Taiwan Solidarity Union (TSU) to recast the rally into a pro-independence event. Organizers express optimism that they will reach their goal of one million participants, but acknowledge the rally has presented immense financial and logistical challenges. While the rally is expected to draw a large turnout, the crowd is likely to be almost exclusively Green. Opposition leaders have criticized Chen's participation in the rally and declined invitations to attend themselves. End Summary.

Walking the Walk, but Not Talking the Talk  
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12. (C) President Chen Shui-bian announced on March 24 that he would walk with his family in the March 26 "Use Peace and Democracy to Protect Taiwan" rally organized to protest the PRC's Anti-Secession Law. Chen said he will "not speak, and not stand in the front of the line, but rather would walk with the people and join them in calling out to the other side (of the Taiwan Strait) that we 'want freedom and love peace.'" The Taiwan media reported on March 25 that the Chen administration consulted with both the USG and PFP before making the announcement over Chen's participation. Several reports speculated that Chen's decision not to speak was the result of USG pressure and a few legislators chimed in charging that Chen was kowtowing to the U.S. Premier Frank Hsieh (Chang-ting) and other senior Chen administration officials will also attend, but not speak at, the event. Hsieh encouraged public servants to take part as well, but said this was not mandatory and no roll would be taken.

13. (C) Presidential Office Deputy Secretary General Ma Yung-chen told AIT the decision to have Chen attend the rally was made to ensure that pro-independence leader and former President Lee Teng-hui did not steal the show. "If the President is there, all the media attention will be on him," Ma remarked, "if he doesn't attend, Lee will dominate the public message." National Security Council (NSC) Secretary General Chiou I-jen told the AIT Director on March 23 that the DPP had manipulated the arrangements to ensure that the TSU delegation is not at the front of the crowd and that Lee

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will not have an opportunity to speak at the main event. TSU Legislative Yuan (LY) Caucus Whip Lai Shin-yuan acknowledged that the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) has effectively marginalized the TSU's role. "Even though the organizing committee is supposed to be run by NGOs, it is the DPP that decides every major facet of the event," she asserted. Lai complained that the TSU has not even been able to find enough buses to transport its supporters to Taipei, "because the DPP has rented almost every vehicle on the island."

Fund It and They Will Come  
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14. (C) DPP Deputy Secretary General Yen Wan-ching, one of the rally's main organizers, expressed confidence that the Saturday rally would achieve its goal of one million participants. Yen noted that eight percent of respondents to a DPP internal poll said they would "definitely attend" the rally. Based on past polling on rallies, Yen said, this response rate already indicates that participation will be well over the one million mark. The major problem facing the organizers now, he continued, was not public interest but transportation and funding for the 200,000 people the DPP has pledged to bring to the event. DPP Chairman Su Tseng-chang led a telethon on March 23 to help meet the party's NTD 80 million (USD 2.58 million) funding shortfall, but officials say their coffers are still empty (Septel). DPP Legislator Bi-khim Hsiao told AIT the party is forcing its LY Members to pay out of pocket to mobilize each member's quota of 40

busloads (or 2,100 people) of participants.

15. (C) The march itself will start in ten different locations around Taipei, each representing a different article of the Anti-Secession Law. Marchers, who will be divided based on sponsoring organization, will converge in front of the Presidential Office building for the final closing ceremony. NSC Secretary General Chiou noted that President Chen would go on stage at the end of the march, but only to join a chorus in singing a traditional Taiwanese folk song. Former President Lee is expected to speak to a group of farmers and TSU supporters at one of the ten starting points, but is not

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scheduled to join the President on stage for the event's closing.

A Green Day

16. (C) While the DPP appears to have succeeded in keeping control of the message for the March 26 rally, it has been less successful in casting the event as a multi-partisan expression of Taiwan's rejection of the Anti-Secession Law. Leaders from both the KMT and PFP declined invitations to join the event, and many opposition figures have criticized the President for his decision to take part. PFP Policy Chief Vincent Chang (Hsieh-yao) told AIT that he is personally sympathetic to the sentiments that will be expressed on March 26, but noted that if PFP Chairman James Soong attends the Saturday march after skipping the March 19 KMT rally to protest the election-eve Presidential shooting (Reftel), he would be excoriated by his supporters. Despite public criticism of Chen's participation in the March 26 rally, Chang said that Soong "can understand" the President's decision to take part.

17. (C) Chang expressed surprise, however, over the KMT's plan to proceed with a visit by party Vice Chairman P.K. Chiang to the PRC just two days after the rally. "They are really leaving themselves open to being labeled as out of touch with Taiwan's public sentiment by acting as if the Anti-Secession Law didn't even happen," Chang added. Mainland Affairs Council (MAC) Chairman Joseph Wu told AIT that he tried unsuccessfully to persuade Chiang not to travel so soon after the Anti-Secession Law's passage in order to protect Chiang's own reputation as a defender of Taiwan interests. However, KMT Organizational Affairs Director Liao Fung-te told AIT that the KMT does, in fact, firmly believe that the Anti-Secession Law is not related to the KMT or Taiwan, but rather targeted only at pro-independence activists within the DPP.

Coming to Closure

18. (C) Despite the partisan nature of the event, DPP government officials are optimistic that the March 26 rally will allow the government to bring political and media focus on the Anti-Secession Law to closure. Tamkang University Professor (and former MAC Vice Chair) Alex Huang told AIT that the March 14 passage of the Anti-Secession Law marked the opening of a period and the March 26 rally its end. Huang expressed confidence that the government will be able to "get back to serious business" soon after the rally concludes. NSC Senior Advisor for cross-Strait policy Chen Chung-hsin offered a similar assessment, but registered concern that strong PRC public criticism of the March 26 rally could complicate efforts to move beyond the Anti-Secession Law. Chen said that Taipei has urged Beijing through various indirect channels to remain silent and let the march serve as a means to release pressure created by the Anti-Secession Law's passage.

Comment: Dominating the Message

19. (C) Logistical challenges and opposition non-participation notwithstanding, it looks like the March 26 rally will meet the objectives the Chen administration had set for it. The DPP appears to have effectively generated enough interest to ensure a large turnout. It has also kept close control over the event's themes and managed to portray the march as a substitute for more problematic alternatives such as a referendum or countervailing legislation. As things currently stand, the TSU's proposed "Anti-Invasion Law" bill shows little chance of making it onto the LY calendar and calls for a "defensive referendum" are gaining little traction. Of course, a last minute decision by President Chen or former President Lee Teng-hui to give a highly emotional speech at the March 26 rally or a sharp public statement out of Beijing could yet keep the Anti-Secession Law on the front burner. However, barring any major surprises, the March 26 rally should help relieve pressure from within the Pan-Green base for the government to fundamentally reorient cross-Strait policy in response to the

PRC's recent legislative actions.  
PAAL